The Project on Allyship to Combat Antisemitism

Latino and Jews at the Dinner Table
Professor Bridget Kevane

Introduction

"Never has a society tolerated overt expressions of antisemitism and remained a democratic society," said Deborah Lipstadt in a November 2023 article in *The New York Times.*

Lipstadt would know. The renowned Holocaust scholar, who won a court case against Holocaust denier David Irving, is the current U.S. special envoy, with a rank of ambassador, to monitor and combat global antisemitism.

Her ominous warning is followed by something simpler: Governments alone, she said, can't solve the problem. "I know it sounds ludicrous, but a lot comes down to what happens at the dinner table."

Lipstadt means that conversations around the dinner table—in any of their manifestations—are formative sites that have the capacity to shape mindsets. In many homes, it is a place of culinary and cultural nourishment, including our understanding of or attitudes towards different social groups. Frequently, along with the forks, knives, and spoons, world views are passed down, shared, discussed, and, sometimes, set in stone. Future citizens are fashioned at the dinner table.

Which also makes it a dangerous site.

Where, Lipstadt seems to ask, is antisemitism born? "Where did [it] come from? How did they [children] learn it was OK?" Where are biases and prejudices nurtured if not at the dinner table? Where do children learn to normalize antisemitism if not at the dinner table?

Although Lipstadt says it may sound ludicrous and, indeed, many might dismiss it as simplistic, I find her dinner table metaphor a useful and imaginative point of departure to discuss Latino Jewish allyship. The dinner table--familial, intimate, academic, public, political, or national—as Lipstadt suggests, may be a space where prejudices are born but it can also be a space where allyship is born.

But how do we get a seat at that dinner table? How do we shape conversations that will go home to the dinner table? We, those of us invested in combatting antisemitism through allyship, should ask ourselves how we can get a seat at someone's dinner table or how, through allyship, we can impact the conversations families and friends have at their dinner table.

Part I: A Dinner Table Story in Montana

I moved to Montana in 1996 for a position as a Latin American and Latino Studies professor at Montana State University. I had never lived in a place like Montana, the fourth largest

state in the nation with an area of 147,040 square miles and only 1.1 million people. Except for the Native American communities, with eight distinct tribes on seven reservations, the state was almost all white (90.6% in 2000 census). In Bozeman, when we arrived, there was a small Jewish community of about twenty or thirty people; there was no rabbi but services and the High Holidays, led by a traveling rabbi, were held at the Holiday Inn. In 2004 Temple Beth Shalom hired its first rabbi and bought a building that was converted into a synagogue. Years later my younger kids were able to celebrate their bar and bat mitzvahs.

The Latino population had also grown by the early 2000s. In 1990 there were 12,174 Latinos in the state and by 2000 there were 18,081, a 48.5% increase. Gentrification drove much of the Latino growth in Gallatin County, as places like the Yellowstone Club and the Big Sky ski resort were built up. To me it was noticeable in the spoken Spanish at Wal-Mart, where the community was drawn to the Hispanic food section and the lower costs of food, or at the Wells Fargo as workers sent remittances home to their families.

In 2006, I became involved with an ad-hoc group, Coalition of Resource Organizations (CORO) as a response to a dramatic increase in the number of Spanish speaking patients seeking care at the local health clinics and the hospital. The gatherings—which initially only included health practitioners—revealed that there were growing needs in other sectors as well. Public schools needed translators for teacher conferences, the Gallatin Valley Food Bank needed signage translated, contractors needed translators for their work force, the dairy farms needed assistance in on site translating, and the Latino community was asking for a bilingual priest at the local parish. CORO worked for many years to address the community needs, including facilitating a conversation with the local Catholic parish which committed to a monthly Spanish mass.

And then, in the early spring of 2013, I was the CORO advocate at a "dinner" table conversation with members of the Jewish and Latino communities. We had gathered in Senator Max Baucus's Bozeman office to urge the senator to vote for Senate Bill 744, the first comprehensive bipartisan bill on immigration reform in three decades. We met with Senator Max Baucus's Regional Director to share personal stories on the importance of a YES vote for the "Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act."

This vote was especially important to the Latino community because Montana, the year before, had passed a nativist legislative bill, LR-121, The Montana Proof of Citizenship Question, that prohibited "providing state services to people who were not U.S. citizens and who had unlawfully entered or unlawfully remained in the United States." That bill created fear, uncertainty, and concern in the community. In fact, it was one of many anti-immigration bills that the Montana legislature had been proposing since 2011.

I sat at a table in Baucus's office next to Rosario (not her real name), a young Latina woman whom I had invited to come to share her personal testimony about the experience of being undocumented in Montana. Rosario had travelled 1,387 miles from Zacatecas, Mexico to Colorado to better provide for her family back home. There, she met her husband, who

worked in construction. Shortly after, he was recruited to Montana where they married and had three children, all U.S. citizens.

In a clear, determined voice, she shared details of her crossing and the costs of being denied citizenship. She had been unable to return to Mexico for her father or brother's funeral for fear of being denied re-entry to the United States, unable to attend college, unable to work because of ICE raids. But every day she risked deportation by driving without a license to take the children to school, to church, and the grocery store.

On my other side sat Rabbi Ed Stafman, of Temple Beth Shalom, the only religious leader present. Rabbi Stafman was a firm believer in the power of interfaith coalitions, especially in Bozeman, where the Jewish faith and culture—indeed Jews themselves—remained unfamiliar to the majority Christian Anglo community. "Immigration," he said at that meeting, "is a Jewish concern. Jews have a long history of immigration, and we understand what it is like to be the marginalized. We believe in immigration reform because it is a common social justice cause, because it is a moral imperative, because it is the right thing to do, and because it is a central narrative in our faith."

That meeting, where we sat around Baucus's elegant conference table as the snow fell outside, where each of us had different dinner table stories, different places of origin, different experiences, resonated with me. It felt powerful. It was an alliance that I hadn't imagined. To hear Rabbi Ed and Rosario share stories that centered a common cause—the right to migrate—felt rich with possibility. Maybe the two groups had something to offer each other on immigration, on education, antisemitism, on social justice, on Israel. If this was happening in my little remote corner of the nation, what was happening at a national level? Were there other "dinner table conversations" happening? And how were they working?

Part II: A Summary of *Hope and Caution: The Dynamics of Jewish Latino Relationships*

I spent the next two and a half years trying to answer these questions and more in what would become my book, *Hope and Caution: The Dynamics of Jewish Latino Relationships* (2015). Although I anchored my book in dialogues and the lived contemporary experiences of Latino and Jewish community leaders, I started with a brief history that highlighted the complicated use of the umbrella term, Latino, as well as the commonality between the two groups.

The label—Latino or Hispanic—contains within it a multitude of nationalities, histories, traditions, languages, and patterns of immigration and assimilation. Each distinct community is here because of U.S. foreign policy intervention and has been welcomed or not depending on those policies. Beginning with the Mexican American War of 1846-48, to the War of 1898, and continuing with repeated 20th century incursions including the Chilean and Argentinian dictatorship, the growing Latino population is in large part due to our foreign policy in Latin American countries. That key fact should be understood as such, especially in heated immigration debates. Why are Latinos here? Because, as historians

know, our foreign policy and economic needs create a powerful "pull" for migrants seeking to flee violence or climate change and seek better economic opportunities.

Latinos also are received differently to the United States. Cubans fleeing the Castro regime received a warm reception with an immediate path to citizenship whereas Hondurans today are rarely allowed a path to citizenship. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens but Mexicans who work in our fields are still at risk of being deported. Cubans are lauded as the most successful Latino minority and, according to some, are considered the Jews of the Caribbean whereas Puerto Ricans are regularly stereotyped as still troubled by violence, drugs, and high dropout rates. Mexicans have been in American territory since the Spanish empire created New Spain. They are both the oldest Latino American citizens and make up the bulk of our newly arrived immigrants. They also, unlike most other Latino communities, have a distinct history related to Judaism, that of the crypto-Jews. Even though some Mexicans, then called tejanos, nuevo mexicanos, californios, have been here for generations, the image of the Mexican is what most people see when they think of the illegal border crosses.

Despite these distinct histories, Jews and Latinos, like so many other marginalized communities, share a history of exile and diaspora and even a small yet growing Latino Jewish population (that is, people who are of both ethnicities).

In the late fifteenth century, Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition found their way to the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic and Cuba, for example, and later Mexico and the Southwest. A few sailors who sailed with Columbus were Jews, and during the period of Spanish colonization, Jews were among those who came to the New World. The waves of Ashkenazic immigration that followed the failed revolutions of 1848 in Europe and the assassination of Czar Alexander in 1880 also caused Jews to scatter to many parts of the New World, not just the United States. During World War II, the Caribbean received a second significant migration of European Jews as well, though as the result of vastly different circumstances than that of Spanish/Portuguese crypto-Jews of the sixteenth century. For example, many of the early American Jewish communities that settled in New York came originally from Spain via Brazil to the new colonies. Given the steadfast durability of the Jewish Diaspora, there exist Jewish communities throughout the Spanish-speaking Caribbean in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, and the Mexican Southwest. The majority of Ashkenazi Latino Jews are those descended from European Jews, those who fled the European oppression and anti-Semitism of Tsarist Russia and Nazi Germany. Many started their lives anew in Latin America or the Caribbean (The Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic, for example, was the only nation from the Evian conference of 1938 who agreed to receive Jewish immigrants). Many moved on during different Latin American dictatorships—for example, those in Cuba, Argentina, and Chile—or simply for economic opportunities to the United States.

To understand the twenty-first century relationship between the Jewish and Latino community, I posed a series of questions: Was the nature of the relationship political? Economic? Transactional? Moral? Who was engaged in the overtures? Was it mostly about immigration? Was it a quid pro quo: we help you with immigration, you help us fight

antisemitism? Could these different communities build strong, enduring bridges with each other? And, finally, why did it matter?

In truth, the power and potential of this relationship was already on the minds of Jewish and Latino leaders. The *Forward's Reporter's Roundtable* named it one of the most important and stimulating inter-ethnic relationships of the 21st century. Dina Siegel Vann, a Mexican Jew who directs the Arthur and Rochelle Belfer Institute for Latino and Latin American Affairs at the American Jewish Community, had already been advocating in practice and in many articles for stronger Latino Jewish relationships. She organized the first Latino-Jewish Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C., in 2001 and, in 2013, the National Conversation on the State of Latino-Jewish Relations. The AJC was also sending young Latino leaders to Israel.

Other activities were taking place as well. For example, the Jewish social justice group Bend the Arc joined an immigration reform rally on the National Mall in Washington, DC. The Conservative Rabbinical Assembly gathered the signatures of 1,300 Jewish clergy from different denominations on a joint letter to Congress calling for an overhaul of current immigration policy. Jewish political organizations redoubled efforts to petition Latinos in the Hispanic Caucus for their support of Israel. AIPAC created an Hispanic outreach branch to educate Latinos on how to lobby their congressmen to support Israel. J Street, the "pro-Israel, pro-peace" lobbyist group, secured the signature of the Hispanic Caucus chair for Palestinian aid. The David Project, a pro-Israel advocacy group, no longer in existence, reached out to Latino students on American college campuses to forge partnerships.

In my book, I tried to understand the context for the upswing in coalition-building that characterized the mid 2000s. Siegel Vann, who spoke with me at length for the book, said that the sheer number of the Latino population—which, in the 2000 Census, took everyone by surprise—alerted the Jewish community to the importance of nurturing a relationship. To her, it was and remains vital that the American Jewish community, whose population of roughly seven million is a fraction of the nation's 63 million Latinos, maintain bridges even as the AJC, as she told me, perceived some indifference from Latino organizations. Jewish organizations could ally with Latinos around immigration reform, housing equity, health care, and more, and Latinos could perhaps become a powerful voting block that would support the existence of the state of Israel as well as antisemitism toward the Jewish community. The belief in the power of partnerships was apparent for Jewish leaders.

Because the partnerships being forged started in political and community organizations, my first chapter focused on the four most important and longest serving organizations of each community. The chapter provided a brief overview of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), Anti-Defamation League (ADL), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR; now named UNIDOS). These four were the earliest organizations created for these communities and thus have an historically important place in the history of community and national organizations. They also shared a mission of supporting the community, defending them against racism, and pursuing civil rights.

My second chapter focused on immigration reform. “Advocacy on behalf of immigration reform,” Siegel Vann told me, “is at its core a Jewish issue both due to historical and ethical considerations, and it is good not only for Latinos but the country as a whole.” The xenophobia and anxiety about the migration of non-Anglo ethnic and racial groups to the United States caused the federal government to create a racial immigration system that favored those from Northern European countries. American antisemitism was vicious and deeply rooted in American cultural identity, especially leading up to WWII. In fact, American nativists found the Eastern European “waves or invasion” to the United States so alarming that they passed the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924, severely restricting Jewish immigration. The hysteria about the “brown” invasion from Mexico and Central America is only the latest in a series of nativism that included antisemitism and Yellow Peril.

Some Jewish leaders I spoke with, however, were unsure about the idea that immigration was equal for both communities. For most Jews, the immigration story is a distant memory. In turn, for Latinos, it has remained a constant reality.

Indeed, the distance between Jewish and Latin American immigration stories and histories is captured by two important symbols and sites of migration: Ellis Island, now a museum, or, as their website states, “a living monument to the story of the American people,” versus the border, the almost 2,000 miles that separates the United States from Mexico, with a border force of more than 20,000 agents, surveillance towers, infrared technologies, and, from Israel, some of the most sophisticated technology developed to prevent crossings. The latter is constantly in the news: It is cast as an open wound, seething, overflowing with desperate migrants that needs to be controlled and portrayed as a porous site that demands more militarization to protect the citizens of the United States.

My next chapter focused on the complicated nature of whiteness in the United States and how non-Anglo Jewish and Latino communities worked to attain “whiteness,” with its promise of full integration and access to the dominant culture. The murder of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman anchored the chapter. Race was at the center of the 2012 crime. The unarmed, Black Florida teenager was shot point blank by Zimmerman, a self-appointed neighborhood watch. A side conversation about Zimmerman’s identity emerged while he was being prosecuted, and eventually declared not guilty. Was he Jewish? Was he white? Was he Mexican? Both the *Forward* and *Tablet* reported on this case of mistaken identity. I, like so many other readers, was transfixed by the more than two hundred comments to Marc Tracy’s post on the *Tablet* magazine declaring Zimmerman was “Not Jewish!” Jewish readers were concerned with two things: first, that Zimmerman would reflect poorly on the community and, second, whether Jews are solidly white and part of the majority or if that whiteness is a precarious position bestowed on Jews until it isn’t. (11: Tablet/ The Forward (9/30/2014).

In my final chapter, I delved into the tangled relationship between the Jewish community and Evangelical Latinos. I interviewed some pastors of evangelical churches who claimed that Israel, a holy site of salvation, is at the center of their faith. Israel stands as the land of the second coming of Christ and salvation for those who believe in Jesus. Israel, then, has become a shared fixture between this Latino subculture and the Jewish population. It is a

problematic idea, indeed contentious, for many in Jewish communities as Israel. Yes, it is, or has been, a community that has fully supported Israel's right to exist, but it also does not account for the fact that Jews in Israel will not be saved unless they convert. This, more than any other aspect of the Latino Jewish alliance, is transactional, political. The Jewish community needs support for Israel, especially as the conflict around the occupied territories persists and erodes support within the American Jewish community.

My book concluded with stories about several Latino Jewish university student groups. These student groups, at University of Texas or University of Pennsylvania, for example, articulated the importance of inter-ethnic relationships. They were actively at the dinner table, sharing Kosher Mexican Cinco de Mayo or Mexican Passover dinners. In the end, perhaps the best hope for the endurance of this inter-ethnic bridge building is that of the friendships started on campuses. Student alliances can, should, and will be the future of this inter-ethnic relationship. Less driven by political motives like support for Israel or immigration and more driven by the openness of college experiences, the bridge-building generation has more at stake in the future. American university campuses are sites of ideological struggles and divisive debates over Israel and immigration. But, as I learned, student coalitions could be the hopeful response to bleak outcomes.

I did not linger on the differences—how Latinos mostly see Jews as white and privileged, how immigration is no longer really at the heart of the Jewish community—but rather on a sentiment shared by one of the students I interviewed: "If there is a healthy partnership, the sky would be the limit for both our communities." (Maritza Mantilla, personal interview, in *Hope and Caution*). All told, my years of interviews, conversations and research left me with the feeling that the communities could and would continue to work together.

III. 'We are Under Assault:'

That book seems like a lifetime ago. My optimism, for I was very much leaning towards the side of hope when I wrote that book, seems naïve. The book seems too pollyannaish, too intent on pushing aside the darker forces of history, the chasm of racism, antisemitism, and nativist anti-immigration policies.

Since then, the stakes have changed dramatically.

In fact, as I was finishing the book, the very ground underneath me shifted. In June 2015, just a few months after it was published, Donald Trump launched his campaign for president.

His rhetoric about immigrants, especially Latinos, was loathsome and, for many, it legitimized their own feelings of animosity towards immigrants. "When Mexico sends its people," he had said on the campaign trail, "they're not sending their best. They're not sending you, or you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us [sic]. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're bringing rapists." A chant blossomed on his 2015 campaign trail as well. *Build the Wall*. The chant had a subtitle: Mexico will pay for the wall. It also had a subtext: any Latino, those crossing, those here, those Mexican or not, were part of this coded rhetoric

about the other in the United States, the other as “rapists” “drug traffickers” and “criminals.”

In fact, as Trump has campaigned in 2024, his stump speeches include even more nefarious statements: “Immigrants,” he said, “are poisoning the blood of our country,” an astounding statement that sounded to many like Hitler’s rhetoric with regard to Jews in Europe. It’s a historical phrase, then, that attacks Latinos and Jews. (Trump claimed he had no idea that Hitler said such things.)

Build the Wall and the Hispanophobia that Trump normalized was coupled with federal policies, mostly signed as executive orders. A Zero Tolerance stance was adopted by his administration toward immigration. With Jeff Sessions and Stephen Miller, his administration crafted one of the most sinister forms of deterrence at the border, separation of children from their parents. Roughly 5,000 parents were separated from their children by 2018. Zero Tolerance did not stop migrants from coming. Not at all. But with Covid, Trump was able to deploy Title 42 stipulating that to keep Americans safe, migrants would not be allowed into the country. Asylum petitions were suspended. Camps sprang up on the border. People waited for two, then three years.

Immigration policies that ranged from Build the Wall, which promised 452 new miles of wall on the U.S. Mexico border—only 52 miles of new primary wall systems were built—Title 42, Migrant Protection Protocols, more commonly known as Remain in Mexico, were meant to stop the flow of migrants. They didn’t. But they enabled the anti-immigrant rhetoric to become a cornerstone of Trumpism and the far-right.

And then, 2017 Charlottesville’s white supremacist, antisemitic march. And then, 2018 Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh. And then, the 2019 Texas Wal-Mart shooting targeting Latinos. And then, Covid. And then, George Floyd. And then, Say Their Names, Me Too, the caravans, January 6th, the Proud Boys. Alt-right, white supremacist, neo-Nazi rhetoric emerged from the woodwork, uninhibited. Words like invasion, illegal aliens, the Great Replacement conspiracy theories, wokeness, the deep web, fed on the nativist and xenophobic and racist fears of many citizens. Anti-immigration, which has always targeted the other has also always used this rhetoric. Social media, Twitter, now X, and other venues made it impossible to stuff any of this nativist, antisemitic or xenophobic rhetoric back in its Pandora’s box.

Both communities were under attack, perennial scapegoats.

After the murder of George Floyd, the word allyship was everywhere. How to do it, why and when to do it, who was responsible for it, who was a real ally, what it meant, when it was performative and more. Dictionary.com chose it as its word of the year in 2021 because, the editors said, it was “a year defined by the many ongoing impacts of the pandemic and the polarization of 2020—and the various ways we continue to grapple with them. The vastness of such a year could never be fully summarized with a single word. But there is one word that’s intertwined with so many of the things we’ve experienced in 2021: *allyship*.”

Their word of the year in 2016? **Xenophobia**.

Long before allyship became a dictionary word of the year, the American Jewish Committee had nurtured partnerships with the Latino community, as stated above. Despite the AJC's consistent efforts, it didn't seem to yield the desired results. In 2019, Siegel Vann gave a speech at the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, a coalition of Latino organizations that advocate for civil rights, asking Latino leaders to commit more seriously to the partnership. She was querulous, perhaps even pleading, as if she knew where the future lay if Latinos and Jews failed to sustain their partnerships: "I have yet to perceive in the organized Latino community [a] strategic commitment and investment towards engaging key Jewish groups as timely partners and allies on issues of common concern." She urged Latino organizations to not forget that they too were under assault, that they must stand together: "If a minority who is considered by all measures a success in integration and political and economic empowerment is still vulnerable, and its sense of belonging to this country challenged, Latinos and other minorities remain in danger, too."

How did Latino organizations like LULAC or La Raza, or even the organizations that were present during her speech? It's hard to know. I emailed Siegel Vann but received no response. I've scrolled through the National Latino Coalition web site and found no mention of that talk or even mention of the American Jewish Committee. Similarly, on the website of the biggest Latino organizations like Unidos (formerly La Raza) or LULAC, featured in my book, there is no mention of allyship whereas on the AJC website it is explicit.

It is possible that Latino organizations, as I had argued in my book, were and remain in battle gear and are unable to respond to allyship in meaningful ways because their focus is strictly on their community, what their organization can do about, for example, food insecurity or inequities in public schools, or the border, or DREAMers and DACA. But that's just speculation.

A more pointed and convincing reason may be found in two 2023 surveys. The first survey was conducted by the AJC and included 125 young Latino adults between the ages of 18-40. The takeaway was captured in the title: "A new American Jewish Committee study of Latino Millennial & Gen Z leaders reveals a troubling disconnect between this growing segment of the American population and the Jewish community." The study found that young Latinos do not feel that American Jews face discrimination the way they and other minorities do despite the evidence of growing antisemitism. And although 52% said they had a positive association with Jews and think there is a natural connection (47%), the majority think of Jews as White and that they are well positioned to advocate for themselves. There were positives as well, as 66% said that, because of their position as emerging leaders, they had a responsibility to speak out against discrimination.

The other major survey, conducted by Eitan Hersh and Laura Royden, sampled 3,500 Black and Latinos, and the study oversampled for those between the ages of 18-30. "Antisemitic Attitudes among Young Black and Hispanic Americans," which was published in April 2023, revealed disturbing trends in these young populations. Hersh and Royden tested

commonly accepted theories about antisemitism within these groups—an affinity toward the Palestinians, education and geography, regular church goers, and white attitudes manifesting as antisemitism—but found that these confounders didn't portray the full picture of antisemitism. All the common variables were still true but when cross checked they didn't offer a convincing explanation. Hersh and Royden introduced in their conclusion a newfound rhetorical and political reason: victimhood. "Popular writing," they write, "has pointed to victimhood as an increasingly prominent force in American political discourse. If Black and Hispanic Americans have a sense of collective victimhood (a plausible hypothesis, due to the renewed salience of race in America in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement), that feeling of victimhood could be leading to higher antisemitic attitudes for a number of reasons."

In addition, they speculated, victimhood, partnered with conspiracy theories, may explain the current rise in antisemitism among the younger Black and Latino populations, especially after George Floyd and Black Lives Matter. But for many, despite how the different variables didn't offer the full picture, the fact remained that their study demonstrated that young Blacks and Latinos maintained higher rates of antisemitism compared to Whites even when they controlled for education, geography, and church attendance. (106) In fact, "young Black and Hispanic respondents express antisemitic attitudes at about the same rates as White alt-right respondents" (106).

This was the landscape until October 6th, 2023.

And then, October 7th, 2023.

When the American Jewish University extended an invitation to different scholars to brainstorm and work on allyship to combat antisemitism, it was before October 7th. I felt inspired by the idea, by the other scholars invited to meet and discuss allyship at a big "dinner" table in Los Angeles.

But post-10/7? My skepticism about the power of allyship hit rock bottom. What, I asked myself, was the point of dinner table conversations, building bridges, forging coalitions, promoting allyship and community friendships, when many American Jews felt that all that work, that all that acceptance, that all that integration, all their "whiteness" was gone? What was the point when our friends had abandoned us? When all the allyship work did not yield the results that the Jewish community hoped for? In fact, to my dismay, only two national Latino organization that I could find spoke out against the Hamas attack: The Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute and the Hispanic Federation.

The 2023 surveys and post-October 7th made me wonder if the term allyship, considered radical, innovative, authentic, was perhaps not a good concept to have when partnering with other groups. Has the work done by the AJC or the ADL in the name of allyship made any difference to the Latinos protesting Israel's occupation of Gaza and chanting from the river to the sea? Has their work impacted the ingrained antisemitism among young Latinos as reported in those surveys?

If we consider immigration one of the most important issues facing organizations like Unidos, LULAC, MALDEF and others, do those organizations believe that Jewish organizations like the ACJ are helping their cause? I don't know the answer, but perhaps Latino organizations understand that immigration i0s such an intractable issue in the United States today that, to them, a partnership or allyship while fine on a superficial level really doesn't yield any results. They would not be wrong. But it isn't the Jewish organizations that have failed on this front but Congress.

Our current landscape, our bleakness, our division, leads me back to Lipstadt's dinner table comment again because we must keep asking ourselves those questions. How do you affect someone's family's private, intimate conversations? How effective is government action on antisemitism, as in Biden's special task force, or institutional action, such as the task force set up by Harvard, for example, versus community or public or private action? We can't invite ourselves over to dinner (or can we?), so where is the best place to have those conversations in the Latino community? In other words, where should those conversations take place? Is the best, most natural home for allyship through activism? Marching together? Or in local acts? Is it policy? Government action? Where can we be the most effective allies?

As someone who supports allyship that goes beyond the optical and flows into real action, I choose to practice allyship at the local level. It's not a trickle-down system, it's not the AJC or Unidos coming together for policy change but rather something smaller, something that can affect dinner conversations at home. For example, in Gallatin County, where I live, there are newcomers arriving almost daily. As chaos, poverty, corruption, drug trafficking and cartels take over countries like Ecuador, which historically was considered one of the safest Latin American countries, migrants are arriving from Hondurans, Venezuelans, Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Cubans. The concerns of these newcomers are urgent. These newer arrivals, scholars of migration have noted, are overall less educated, less literate, and are poorer, than many previous waves.

Not all, but most of the families live in trailer homes. More than one family, sometimes more than two families, per home. Children who have had interrupted education have arrived alone, parents with low levels of literacy and sometimes no schooling are looking for jobs. Families who head to work on construction sites early in the morning, 4:30 am being typical. Their concerns are survival and getting ahead, sending remittances home, and having food on the table. Their concerns are stable housing, access to healthcare, or not being picked up and deported by ICE.

In 2020, just months before everything shut down, I joined a new organization responding to the influx of Latinos to the county: Bienvenidos. The organization pairs a bilingual member from the Bozeman community with a newcomer family guiding them toward resources, connecting them with public schools, health clinics, immigration laws, and more. But more than that, Bienvenidos mentors or advocates share "bread" with these families, joining them for small dinners or picnics or just a coffee. The family that I have mentored knows I'm Jewish and, most likely, they've never met a Jewish woman before as

they come from one of the most rural regions of Honduras. But they will remember that *esa señora judía* was, for many years, part of our dinner conversations.

The dinner conversation can also happen in an academic setting. With three colleagues, I started a program at my home university called Academia Familia Latina inviting newcomer Latino families to the university. Most have never set foot on a university campus, their educational level ranges from third grade to high school, many have children who are not documented, and most do not believe that the university is a place for them. Although the five-session pilot provided families with basic information about post-secondary opportunities, including financial planning, FAFSA, admission guidelines and vocational opportunities, the most important part was the dinner. Families were invited to first partake in dinner with us-- pizza, sandwiches, fried chicken—before any content, they were invited to break bread with other Latino families, to chat, to dream, to plan.

Allyship is, for me, small, local acts. Creating pathways for vulnerable populations, which is also us, Jews, even if we are considered white, privileged, and part of the dominant culture. It is asking, *What do you need?* And it is asking, *What do we need, both of us, together?* Allyship holds an enduring fascination for those who remain othered in the United States. Let's join forces, let's become too strong so that we are never othered again, so that we cannot be conquered, segregated or maligned.

But it's an unsettled concept. I'm not sure where it works. But maybe we don't ask, does it work but rather, how do we keep trying. Because what is there *but* allyship when it comes to fighting injustice, antisemitism, Hispanophobia, and more? Do we let each other go? Or do we ask our partners to stay with us? Can we have dinner conversations at a national level, a local level, an international level? Being called up to rethink this allyship by the American Jewish University was also a dinner table conversation, one in which we all sat, stunned by 10/7 but determined to continue the conversation.